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When you conduct research about a group of people, it's rarely possible to collect data from every person in that group. Instead, you select a **sample**. The sample is the group of individuals who will actually participate in the research.

To draw valid conclusions from your results, you have to carefully decide how you will select a sample that is representative of the group as a whole. This is called a **sampling method**. There are two primary types of sampling methods that you can use in your research:

- **Probability sampling** involves random selection, allowing you to make strong statistical inferences about the whole group.
- **Non-probability sampling** involves non-random selection based on convenience or other criteria, allowing you to easily collect data.

You should clearly explain how you selected your sample in the [methodology](#) section of your paper or thesis, as well as how you approached minimizing [research bias](#) in your work.

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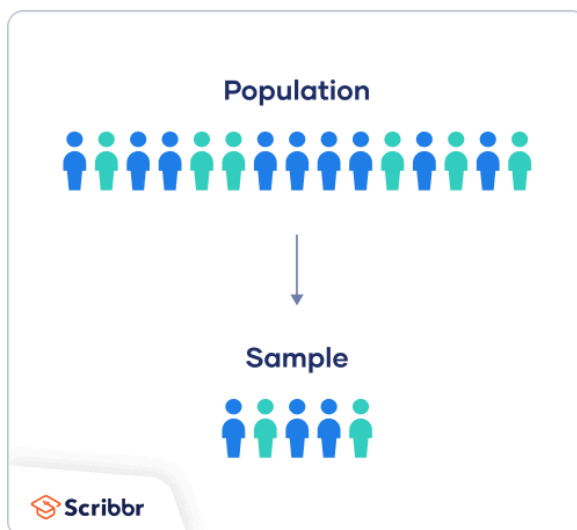
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Population vs. sample

First, you need to understand the difference between [a population](#) and [a sample](#), and identify the target population of your research.

- The **population** is the entire group that you want to draw conclusions about.
- The **sample** is the specific group of individuals that you will collect data from.

The population can be defined in terms of geographical location, age, income, or many other characteristics.



It can be very broad or quite narrow: maybe you want to make inferences about the whole adult population of your country; maybe your research focuses on customers of a certain company, patients with a specific health condition,

or students in a single school.

It is important to carefully define your target population according to the purpose and practicalities of your project.

If the population is very large, demographically mixed, and

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will be drawn from. Ideally, it should include the entire target population (and nobody who is not part of that population).

Example: Sampling frame

You are doing research on working conditions at a social media marketing company. Your population is all 1000 employees of the company. Your sampling frame is the company's HR database, which lists the names and contact details of every employee.

Sample size

The number of individuals you should include in your sample depends on various factors, including the size and [variability](#) of the population and your research design. There are different [sample size calculators](#) and formulas depending on what you want to achieve with [statistical analysis](#).

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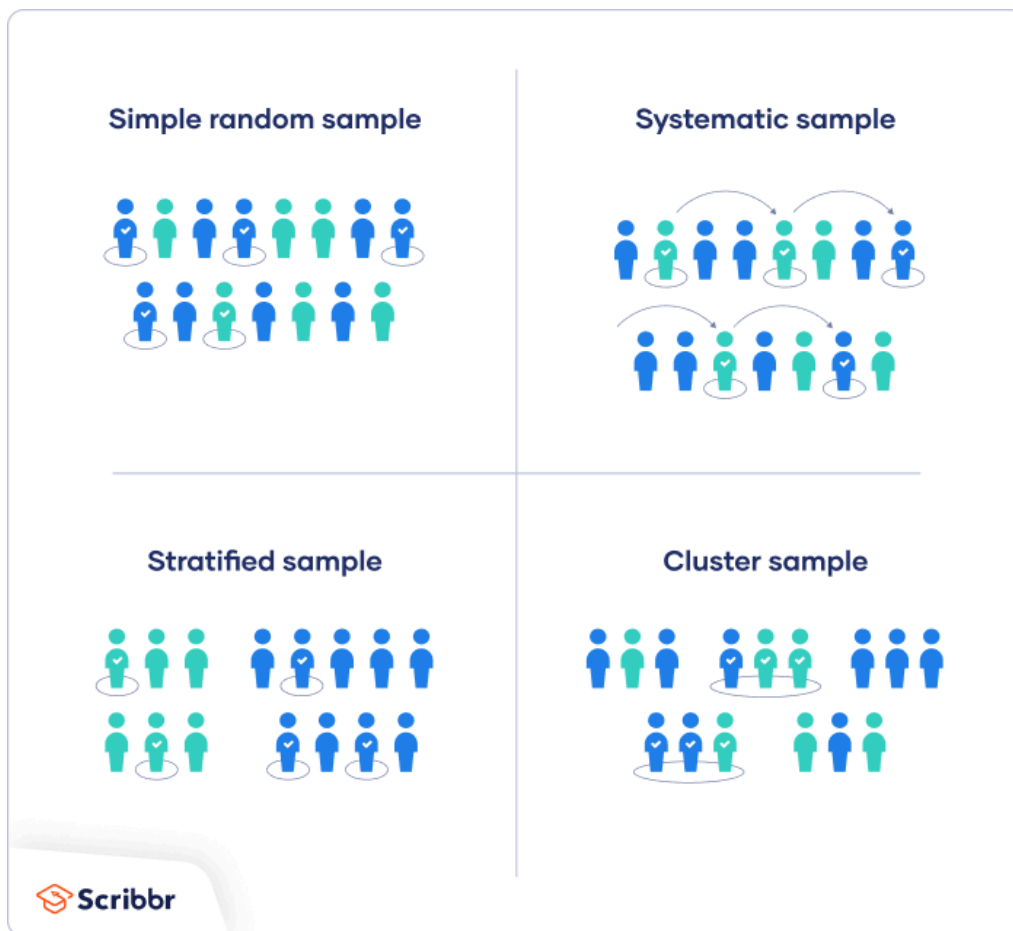
- ✓ Academic style
- ✓ Vague sentences
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the whole population, probability sampling techniques are the most valid choice.

There are four main types of probability sample.



1. Simple random sampling

In a simple random sample, every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. Your sampling frame should include the whole population.

To conduct this type of sampling, you can use tools like random

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1 to 1000, and use a random number generator to select 100 numbers.

2. Systematic sampling

Systematic sampling is similar to simple random sampling, but it is usually slightly easier to conduct. Every member of the population is listed with a number, but instead of randomly generating numbers, individuals are chosen at regular intervals.

Example: Systematic sampling

All employees of the company are listed in alphabetical order. From the first 10 numbers, you randomly select a starting point: number 6. From number 6 onwards, every 10th person on the list is selected (6, 16, 26, 36, and so on), and you end up with a sample of 100 people.

If you use this technique, it is important to make sure that there is no hidden pattern in the list that might skew the sample. For example, if the HR database groups employees by team, and team members are listed in order of seniority, there is a risk that your interval might skip over people in junior roles, resulting in a sample that is skewed towards senior employees.

3. Stratified sampling

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Based on the overall proportions of the population, you calculate how many people should be sampled from each subgroup. Then you use random or [systematic sampling](#) to select a sample from each subgroup.

Example: Stratified sampling

The company has 800 female employees and 200 male employees. You want to ensure that the sample reflects the gender balance of the company, so you sort the population into two strata based on gender. Then you use random sampling on each group, selecting 80 women and 20 men, which gives you a representative sample of 100 people.

4. Cluster sampling

Cluster sampling also involves dividing the population into subgroups, but each subgroup should have similar characteristics to the whole sample. Instead of sampling individuals from each subgroup, you randomly select entire subgroups.

If it is practically possible, you might include every individual from each sampled cluster. If the clusters themselves are large, you can also sample individuals from within each cluster using one of the techniques above. This is called [multistage sampling](#).

This method is good for dealing with large and dispersed

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with roughly the same number of employees in similar roles).

You don't have the capacity to travel to every office to collect your data, so you use random sampling to select 3 offices – these are your clusters.

Non-probability sampling methods

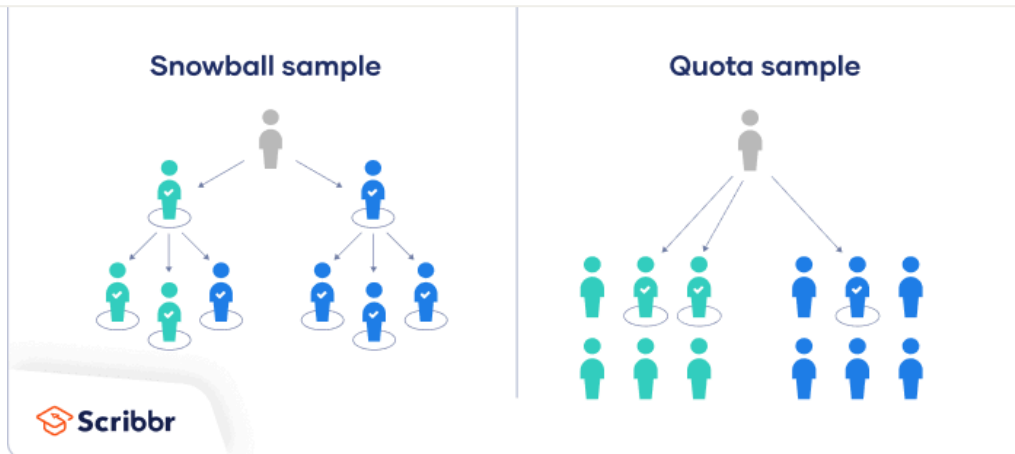
In a non-probability sample, individuals are selected based on non-random criteria, and not every individual has a chance of being included.

This type of sample is easier and cheaper to access, but it has a higher risk of [sampling bias](#). That means the inferences you can make about the population are weaker than with probability samples, and your conclusions may be more limited. If you use a non-probability sample, you should still aim to make it as representative of the population as possible.

Non-probability sampling techniques are often used in [exploratory](#) and [qualitative research](#). In these types of research, the aim is not to test a [hypothesis](#) about a broad population, but to develop an initial understanding of a small or under-researched population.

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1. Convenience sampling

A convenience sample simply includes the individuals who happen to be most accessible to the researcher.

This is an easy and inexpensive way to gather initial data, but there is no way to tell if the sample is representative of the population, so it can't produce **generalizable** results. Convenience samples are at risk for both **sampling bias** and **selection bias**.

Example: Convenience sampling

You are researching opinions about student support services in your university, so after each of your classes, you ask your fellow students to complete a **survey** on the topic. This is a convenient way to gather data, but as you only surveyed students taking the same classes as you at the same level, the sample is not representative of all the students at your university.

2. Voluntary response sampling

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as some people may be more likely to respond than others, leading to [self-selection bias](#).

Example: Voluntary response sampling

You send out the survey to all students at your university and a lot of students decide to complete it. This can certainly give you some insight into the topic, but the people who responded are more likely to be those who have strong opinions about the student support services, so you can't be sure that their opinions are representative of all students.

3. Purposive sampling

This type of sampling, also known as judgement sampling, involves the researcher using their expertise to select a sample that is most useful to the purposes of the research.

It is often used in [qualitative research](#), where the researcher wants to gain detailed knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than make statistical inferences, or where the population is very small and specific. An effective purposive sample must have clear criteria and rationale for inclusion. Always make sure to describe your [inclusion and exclusion criteria](#) and beware of [observer bias](#) affecting your arguments.

Example: Purposive sampling

You want to know more about the opinions and experiences of disabled students at your university, so you purposefully

select a number of students with different support needs in

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people. The downside here is also representativeness, as you have no way of knowing how representative your sample is due to the reliance on participants recruiting others. This can lead to [sampling bias](#).

Example: Snowball sampling

You are researching experiences of homelessness in your city. Since there is no list of all homeless people in the city, probability sampling isn't possible. You meet one person who agrees to participate in the research, and she puts you in contact with other homeless people that she knows in the area.

5. Quota sampling

Quota sampling relies on the non-random selection of a predetermined number or proportion of units. This is called a quota.

You first divide the population into mutually exclusive subgroups (called strata) and then recruit sample units until you reach your quota. These units share specific characteristics, determined by you prior to forming your strata. The aim of quota sampling is to control what or who makes up your sample.

Example: Quota sampling